

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic commerce system for effecting a real time register of a funds transfer associated with a transaction in a secure network environment comprising:
- an association of user account custodians and merchant account custodians subscribing to a common rule set in which users and merchants are associated with their respective account custodians;
 - a network linking user account custodians, merchant account custodians, users and merchants; users and their account custodians; merchants and their account custodians; user account custodians, merchant account custodians and a settlement mechanism;
 - a vendor mall including at least one merchant, said mall allowing access by a user to the at least one merchant for a transaction having a defined value and being accessible by a user through a network connection from a user account custodian;
 - a network switch linking the mall with user account custodians, merchant account custodians and a settlement mechanism;
 - means in the network switch for receiving transaction information from the mall comprising at least a user indicia, transaction value, and merchant identity; for associating user indicia with account custodians; for associating merchants with their account custodians; for transmitting a record of transaction value and user indicia and merchant identity, respectively, to the user account custodian and to the merchant account custodian;

a mechanism in the user account custodian to effect a guarantee of good funds in the account in the amount of the transaction value and to separate funds from the users account into a transaction value file associated with the merchant account custodian;

control means in the switch to initiate the settlement mechanism and to effect net settlement of transaction value between and among user account custodians and merchant account custodians.

2. The system of claim 1 in which users and their account custodians are organized in the system in separate institution centered relationships secured by one or more than one of a firewall, certificate of authority system and identity authentication system.

3. The system of claim 1 in which a hot file screens attempted user entry attempts for lost or stolen cards or identifications, closed accounts and other criteria involved in predetermined rules governing user access parameters.

4. The system of claim 2 in which an identification system includes one or more of a user's check, debit card, credit card, smart card or biometric identification, PIN, or combination thereof, issued to the user upon subscription into the system.

5. The system of claim 1 in which a user's entrance into a vendor mall is correlated by the user account custodian with a record of a user's verified identity.

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1 6. The system of claim 5 in which a verification of the customer's identity is
2 derived from indicia on one or more of a check, a debit, credit or smart card, biometric
3 identification and PIN.

1 7. The system of claim 5 or claim 6 in which upon authentication, a unique digital
2 trace identifier including an identification of the user account custodian is issued to the
3 user by the user account custodian and the custodian maintains a record of the trace
4 identifier issued to the user.

1 8. The system of claim 7 including in the vendor mall one of a custodian file
2 database or look up table that associates the trace identifier with the user's account
3 custodian.

1 9. The system of claim 7 including in the vendor mall one of a custodian file
2 database or look up table that associates an account custodian of record for each mall
3 merchant.

1 10. The system of claim 8 in which the same database or look up table associates
2 the trace identifier with the user's account custodian and the account custodian of
3 record for each mall merchant.

11. The system of claim 9 in which the same database or look up table associates the trace identifier with the user's account custodian and the account custodian of record for each mall merchant.

12. The system of claim 7 in which, in the event of a user transaction with a merchant at the mall, the merchant prepares a transaction information record recording at least the amount of the transaction, the trace identifier for the user and the account custodian of record for the merchant for transmission over the network to the account custodian of record for the merchant.

13. The system of claim 12 in which the user and merchant are associated with the same custodian and the transaction is an ON US transaction in which the custodian effects a real time transfer of actual funds from user's account to the merchant's account.

14. The system of claim 12 in which the transaction information record is transmitted to the network switch connecting user account custodians and merchant account custodians and the network switch transmits to the user account custodian a record of the transaction value and user trace identifier and transmits to the merchant account custodian a record of the transaction value and the merchant identity.

15. The system of claim 1 in which a mail server is interrelated with the network switch interconnecting user account custodians and merchant account custodians and

includes a database or look up table for transaction information records and merchant funds custodians.

16. The system of claim 15 including a periodic net settlement of all account custodians in which the actual transfer of value among custodians corresponding to aggregate net value owing or credited in a period is accomplished through one of Federal Reserve settlement, a private clearing house mechanism, and the network switch.

17. The system of claim 1 in which access to the system by a user is effected by a PC terminal, a wired or wireless personal communication device, browser, Web or Internet appliance, ATM, or kiosk.

18. The system of claim 1 in which the value of a transaction is associated with real funds or a credit line.

19. The system of claim 1 in which a user transaction is initiated at a physical location of a merchant.

20. The system of claim 17 in which a user initiates a transaction at a virtual point of sale.

21. The system of claim 1 in which the mechanism in the user account custodian to effect a guarantee of good funds in the account in the amount of the transaction value includes a debit authorization and memo/hard post item against a demand deposit account of the user.

22. The system of claim 1 in which the mechanism in the user account custodian to effect a guarantee of good funds in the account in the amount of the transaction value includes a debit authorization and memo/hard post item against a credit line of the user.

24. The system of claim 1 including a mailbox accessible through the network and assigned to an account custodian for real time lookup of net debits and credits owing from or payable to the custodian.

depositor institution; debits the payor institution; and transmits the record to the payor institution;

the payor institution receives the transaction information, verifies the user check writer's account balances and puts a hard memo post hold item in the amount of the check on the account of the user check writer.

26. The system of claim 1 in which the mall is a virtual private network comprised of the multiple vendors.

27. The system of claim 1 including an interconnection between the vendor's mall site and the vendor's distribution center, whereby at the time of a transaction with a user when the vendor is credited with good funds, shipment of the goods of the transaction to the user is approved.

28. The system of claim 26 in which the virtual private network has a third party administrator.

29. The system of claim 1 wherein the settlement mechanism is the network switch.

30. An electronic commerce system for effecting a real time register of a funds transfer associated with a transaction in a secure network environment comprising:

an association of employee account custodians and employer account custodians in which employees and employers are associated with their respective account custodians;

a network linking employee account custodians, employer account custodians, employees and employers; employee account custodians, employer account custodians and a settlement mechanism;

a third party intermediary reimbursement service site, said reimbursement site allowing access by an employee for a reimbursement transaction having a defined value and being accessible by an employee through a network connection;

a network switch linking the reimbursement site with employee account custodians, employer account custodians and a settlement mechanism;

means in the network switch for receiving transaction information from the reimbursement site comprising at least an employee indicia, transaction value, and employer identity; for associating employee indicia with account custodians; for associating employers with their account custodians; for transmitting a record of transaction value and employee indicia and employer identity, respectively, to the employee account custodian and to the employer account custodian;

a mechanism in the employer account custodian to effect a guarantee of good funds in the account in the amount of the transaction value and to separate funds from the employer's account into a transaction value file associated with the employee account custodian;

24 control means in the switch to initiate the settlement mechanism and to effect net
25 settlement of transaction value between and among employer account custodians and
26 employee account custodians.

1 31. An electronic commerce system for effecting a real time register of a funds
2 transfer associated with a transaction in a secure network environment comprising:

3 an association of user account custodians and merchant account custodians
4 subscribing to a common rule set in which users and merchants are associated with
5 their respective account custodians;

6 a network linking user account custodians, merchant account custodians, users and
7 merchants; users and their account custodians; merchants and their account custodians;
8 user account custodians, merchant account custodians and a settlement mechanism;

9 a vendor mall including at least one merchant, said mall allowing access by a user to
10 the at least one merchant for a transaction having a defined value and being accessible
11 by a user through a network connection;

12 a network switch linking the mall with user account custodians and merchant account
13 custodians;

14 means in the network switch for receiving transaction information from the mall
15 comprising at least a user indicia, transaction value, and merchant identity; for
16 associating user indicia with account custodians; for associating merchants with their
17 account custodians; for transmitting a record of transaction value and user indicia and
18 merchant identity, respectively, to the user account custodian and to the merchant

19 account custodian; and for effecting net settlement of transaction value between and
20 among user account custodians and merchant account custodians; and
21 a mechanism in the user account custodian to effect a guarantee of good funds in the
22 account in the amount of the transaction value and to separate funds from the users
23 account into a transaction value file associated with the merchant account custodian.

1 32. The system of claim 31 wherein the vendor mall is accessed by a user through a
2 network connection to the at least one merchant.